

人類は衰退しました

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田中 口ミオ

イラスト／戸部 淑



GAGAGA

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田中ロミオ
イラスト／戸部淑



GAGAGA

Jinrui wa Suitai Shimashita - Volume 01

Chapter 01 (Incomplete)

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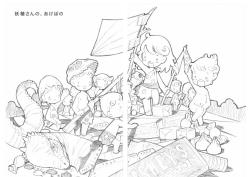
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The Planet of the Fairies

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Chapter 1 - Planet of the Fairies[edit]



This was terribly bumpy.

Paved decades ago, perhaps even centuries ago, the asphalt road was presently an abandoned highway without the slightest trace of humanity in sight. Weeds had sprung up on both sides, and roots had grown around it like veins, slowly transforming this place into a primeval wilderness.

The flatbed truck tread indifferently over this road that could hardly be called a road.

Seated atop it, I could only describe my feelings with exceedingly miserable vocabulary.

Every time the car rose up above an obstacle, abrupt shocks would vibrate up through the platform... thereupon shaking me and the boxes I was packed alongside with.

I blamed myself for thinking that traveling in the bed of a truck would be a graceful experience. It was far too stupid of me.

I was so fortunate as to be traveling on a road surrounded with flowers bursting in full bloom, yet I was no particular mood to admire it thanks to the excessive pain in my buttocks,.

This situation in itself reminded me of the song, “Donna, Donna.” [\[1\]](#)

“If only I had just sat down in the passenger’s seat... never mind.”

I mumbled to myself, but quickly rejected that train of thought. If I had sat down there, I would have been expected to singlehandedly strike up

conversation with the caravan leader in the driver's seat. As someone who was endowed with a brain that froze with total blanks and was otherwise terrible with strangers, that span of time probably would have shaved my nerves dangerously thin.

My brain or my butt. Obviously I'd rather that the latter get shaved thin.

Be as that may, I seriously couldn't bear this any further, so I turned towards the driver to ask a question.

First I took a deep breath.

"...Excuse me, how much longer will it be?"

I messed up my pronunciation, but it didn't seem like he noticed, so I didn't correct myself. Ugh, I was really bad at talking to strangers.

"Three, maybe four hours. That is, if the sun doesn't get covered up."

The caravan leader must have been a statue with how little he moved his head as he responded.

After I giving my brief thanks, my attention fixated itself on this crude solar cell unit that was spread open like an umbrella above the canopy.

This flatbed truck simultaneously used fuel cells and solar energy as its power source, so I figured it must have been a gasoline-electric "hybrid car." The fact that it was still operational was rather miraculous—although, the car itself probably used only one of those energy sources most of the time.

As we traveled, I started to feel restless.

Since that guy let me ride along for free, I really wasn't in a position to complain.

But since this truck was pulling an enormous load, it slowly lumbered forward at the thrilling speed of eight kilometers per hour.

"Four more hours of this..."

Around then, the driver began to hum from his seat.

With the warm sunlight shining down on the driver, he looked so very nice and comfortable.

I, on the hand, simply couldn't bear the ache in my butt anymore, so I stood up. But then— “I strongly advise against standing up, since there was once a person who did so but fell off. Incidentally, that person got swept up in the wheels and was dragged around for a very long time before he died.”

I immediately sat back down into my previous spot.

If that was the case, at the very least I needed to distract myself. I ended up looking at the cluster of wildflowers at the opposite side of the road.

A panorama of yellow rapeseed flowers occupied most of my field of view.

That was a very convenient plant that could processed into oil or pickled as an edible vegetable.

On the downside, if you approached them, there'd be a huge hoard of aphids that'd pounce on you. As a result, I had no desire to to prance into the midst of it like I might have had in the past. My maiden-like naivety had deteriorated, a little bit like what was presently happening to my tortured butt on this journeying flatbed truck.

With the ache in my buttocks gradually worsening, I dejectedly gazed at the scenery outside, just when a tiny head poked out from a bed of flowers.

“...”

Our eyes met.

For probably a second or so?

However, it quickly ducked back in, as if to escape.

“...Ah.”

This was my second time seeing *them* ever since I was a child.

Even though it was abrupt and lasted only a split second, I was absolutely sure I wasn't mistaken.

From just one glance, they had this particular look that was simply unforgettable.

I smiled, forgetting how much my butt hurt.

“So they even lived in these kinds of places, too.”

It was common knowledge that they could live virtually anyplace where life was possible, but they rarely showed themselves in front of people. As a result, I personally considered this unexpected encounter to be a sign of good luck.

I needed to establish friendly relations with them.

As a member of the last graduating class of 《School》, this was my final duty.

I leaned against the edge of the platform, my cheeks feeling the gentle caress of a light breeze as I lost myself in memories of the past.

The graduation ceremony was three days ago.

It had taken place in this old decrepit lecture hall.

You might think that this'd be a dangerous place to hold a ceremony, but please don't worry.

The auditorium was so old that it basically didn't even have any more ceiling or stone walls that *could* crumble or fall down.

When we entered the auditorium, which was polished so spotlessly that hardly a single speck could be seen on the shiny floor, there was a lonely island of twelve chairs packed so closely together that we had to stand a little bit as we waited.

The sharp fragrance that wafted up from a fresh-cut flower pinned on my breast made my nose tingle a little. They would be like this until they withered—a poignant reminder that these were the last moments we'd spend together as students.

Once we graduated, all that was left of us was to return to our villages.

I had thought I'd accept this with all the calm indifference in the world. However, the moment I stepped into that auditorium, the scenery in my heart abruptly became blur.

I had a premonition in my gut that this ceremony wasn't going to end so simply.

Excluding the faculty, there were a lot of attendees at this graduation.

But among those guests, there were hardly any parents. That was because to

attend School, most of us came from distant villages and were subsequently introduced to the routine of dormitory life.

As such, the audience was comprised primarily of officials who were vaguely connected to education or the dealings of the School.

Also, there were far more teachers and guests than graduating students.

When the ceremony began, intense pressure sank down on us.

Before it started, we had all boldly declared we weren't going to cry.

It would have been embarrassing to shed tears in front of such a large audience of people, especially as we were about to become adults.

Since there were only twelve graduates, the ceremony should have been a quick affair.

However, a large group of teachers lined up neatly on the stage and took their sweet time to call each of us onto the podium one by one. They deliberately used informal language interspersed with touching comments. The presentation of diplomas was even carefully synchronized with a live performance of Chopin's "Farewell Waltz." [\[2\]](#)

By the end of it, everyone was crying. It was unbelievable.

The comments that the teachers gave were actually very simple.

Supposing that they had notes in their hands, one sentence would have been enough to summarize their main point. It was probably something like, "Talk about a special memory you share with each student."

But the biggest thing was how they managed to express themselves with such masterful skill.

The words they used held just a hint of malice, mixed with large helping of diverse rhetoric. Together with the flashbacks that they powerfully evoked, they shook the foundations of their listeners like earthquakes; originally I thought they would have been calm and thoroughly rational, but they actually employed personification and vivid scenes of nature to produce emotionally evocative performances of lyricism. Every time they reached the end of sentence, an eternity of silence would hang suspended, just to be tightly resumed moments

later as they sung our praises and swept us away, a hauntingly ephemeral coda to that spoken verse... again and again this procedure on the podium would rain upon us graduates to the point our moist eyes couldn't take on any more water. Only afterwards would this deluge stop just in time, gently fading away like it was never there.

No matter how you saw it, they were out to get us.

It took less than a minute for my ship to be hopelessly sunk, although my fellow graduates fared hardly any better.

Even my friend Y, who hated to show emotion in front of others, was hiding tears behind her glasses as soon as she got on the stage.

Now that you think about it, this was probably our teachers' way of secretly getting revenge for all the pain we caused them in the past as students. I personally thought this was very plausible.

After the scene of our public humiliation finally ended, all of us graduates held spotless, pure white, and shiny diplomas in our hands.

We had spent more than ten years of our life going through School, studying all sorts of subjects and experiencing all kinds of things, just to receive this trimmed piece of paper. It was as weightless as a feather, and it left a gap in my heart that felt just as empty.

We took our wilted flowers and pressed them within the graduation yearbooks that were given to us as mementos. These days, photographs have become quite a rare thing. In the past, one could flip through pictures at a whim, stirring up memories of those old days; now, memories were just figments of imagination.

Like this, the sadness burst forth from the auditorium where we held our farewell party.

I'm afraid it's simply impossible for me to put those blurry emotions into words, since I myself as the recordkeeper succumbed to these feelings as well. As such, I'll only jot down the important details below.

It mostly consisted of the following.

Things were carried into the room, dishes that I'd never seen before; a multicolored rainbow of fallen fruit on the floor; makeshift firecrackers that somebody put together; corks popping from bottles of champagne; an improvised piano performance; shouting graduates; crying graduates; laughing graduates; graduates who got too carried away and embarrassed themselves to death (that would be me); my friend Y's swollen red eyes after she came out from spending ten minutes in the bathroom; the older guests toasting drinks with each other; the male graduates being goaded by everyone to chug alcohol nonstop; the rough blare of a jazz trumpet; an old granny whom I've never met before crying while holding my hand; a ragtag disheveled choir; old people crying just as much as the graduates; the second hand and the hour hand overlapping as midnight approached—

School was humanity's last educational institution.

The universities of the past, cultural associations of the past, non-government organizations of the past... I heard that over one hundred years ago, all of these facilities were combined as the Institution of School. It was something that happened a very long time ago.

This merging of institutions was analogous to a phenomenon that was occurring all over the world: the rapid decline of human population.

As population fell, so did the number of children.

Eventually there weren't enough students.

As educational institutions merged, school districts sequentially expanded in size and discipline... this trend soon became the norm everywhere.

It was only downhill from there.

As early as fifty years ago, it became normal to gather all the world's children in the few remaining towns that had schools, and have them study and live in dormitories.

Our School, which was humankind's very last educational institution and the home to us twelve graduates, was finally accepting its fate and being closed down.

From now on, you could infer that society would regress to the model where

knowledge was passed on directly from parent to child.

This brings us back to my present situation with my still tormented butt. We were finally arriving at my village.

As we advanced along the road, there was a massive looming shadow that blocked our view.

That was a great camphor tree.^[3] Immediately I knew this was the same tree that was seared in my faint childhood memories; I had seen it before.

The tree was a sort of landmark that separated 《The Village》 and the outer world.

As my memories continued to resurface, we passed an area with a few ruins of peoples' houses that were completely consumed by lush and vibrant undergrowth. The tree's presence was extremely conspicuous.

From the Village until the camphor tree, I think it would have taken a child about three hours to walk there on foot. That tree was considered a distant adventure for every child who lived in the Village.

Going at the pace of this flatbed truck, it would probably take another two hours to get there if things went smoothly.

I leaned back against my luggage, trying to relax.

I had a new life waiting for me at the Village.

When I chose to pursue a career at my village when I graduated, I had told myself that I'd put my all into it no matter how difficult the path proved to be.

I would finally be able to apply my knowledge and techniques of cultural anthropology gained from studying over ten years at School. I was still inexperienced as a scholar-apprentice, though. The road ahead was undoubtedly challenging, and it called for a blazing youthful spirit with a stubborn unwillingness to compromise, concede, admit defeat, or fall to laziness. If you didn't have a desire for near-perfection, then you had no hope of truly reaching the top. Despite this, I still harbored the ambition of becoming a young researcher. After all, I was young and had been given the opportunity to do so. You could say heading forward was the only option open to me now.

Though, I definitely wouldn't complain if I could achieve my ambitions without lifting a finger.

When we passed the fork in the road, the shaking stopped all of a sudden.

Presumably, we had entered Camphorwood already. As expected of civilized country, the ground was actually flat.

“Mmn~”

Even though I was trying to sleep with a wet towel over my eyes while rudely crammed in the gap between two wooden crates, I knew precisely where we were just from the extent of the vibrations.

But it seemed like my energy had actually drained from attempting to sleep like this. I didn't even have the strength to get up or open my eyes.

My hands blindly fumbled around for the edge of the truck so I could haul myself up with my wrists.

“Mmmmmmmnnnnnnnn~”

Wriggling like an inchworm, I clung the edge of the truck with great difficulty and gasped for breath. Because of the shaking from earlier, my stomach had nearly turned itself inside out. All of this acid was caught in my throat.

I dragged myself up like I was doing a pull-up and rested my chin on the edge of the shelf. Finally I was able to open my eyes.

Right now, the truck was weaving through gaps between peoples' houses.

The fences of these cottages were so close, I could reach out with my hand and touch them. Even though this was the main street that ran through this village, it was still quite narrow since this large flatbed truck could barely fit in it.

Ahhh, it wouldn't be long before I'd reunite with the lovely flat ground that I had missed so much.

The mere thought of this revitalized me slightly, and I eagerly surveyed my surroundings.

Among the nicer cottages that were densely nestled up against each other, there were a few iron chimneys that stuck out of the roofs, puffing smoke. People were probably cooking dinner right now.

The houses that people lived in were all painted in vivid pastel colors, making them very conspicuous. Although they looked like they were in fine condition, most of them were probably internally decayed buildings with histories of over a hundred years. Although they weren't that severely rotten, the sight of the occasional bout of acid rain eroding the outer walls was not particularly pretty.

For the people of this epoch, however, these pastel houses were a part of the cultural heritage, evoking feelings of nostalgia and childhood memories.

The scenery that presently unraveled in front of my eyes curiously superimposed itself with images from my resurfaced childhood memories. It was a very thought-provoking experience.

Various things such that one cottage in the Village which received a very reckless pink paint job.

Or like how we used to go to the town hall to look at picture books or play games.

And also the gentle old lady who had a hobby of making sweets in that cream-colored house. As long as children brought her the ingredients, she'd whip up all kinds and varieties of sweets.

The truck steadily advanced forward, and soon a plaza appeared before me.

The town square was a round space that had been cleared from several demolished buildings.

“Eeep!”

All of a sudden I got flustered, and ducked down.

I felt strangely mortified at the thought of meeting all the people whom I once knew a long time ago. Also, I was absolutely horrible at talking in front of large crowds. If I had a choice, I would have preferred to give my greetings to each of them individually... but the truck plodded onwards at the center of everyone's persistent attention. It chugged forward while pulling its enormous load, until

finally stopped in the middle of the Village Square.

I desperately searched for a hiding spot that couldn't be seen from the steps when the rear loading bay was opened, and I skidded into the empty space between a wooden crate and the side of the vehicle. I thought this spot was pretty good since I could conceal my entire profile if I pulled in my legs and ducked my head. I could wait here until everyone's excitement died down.

But the entire world seemingly hated me. As fate would have it, when the metal winch turned and went clankity clank, the entire side panel of the truck lowered precisely at the spot where I was trying to hide from everyone's sight. A throng of people had collected to pick up the supplies, and their eyes instantly fell upon the open stage. There was me, awkwardly folded up in the fetal position.

A pipe fell out of the mouth of a man who was waiting in the front row.

It seemed like this truck was a model that could open up on its sides as well as in the back.

A rather familiar-looking middle aged lady gasped in complete astonishment. She was just like somebody in my memories, and I'm pretty sure she recognized me too— “Aren't you that—?”

I silently buried my head in my knees.

Dragging my absolutely worn out and drained body, I finally brought my hand to the door of my own house.

“I'm home... Grandpa?”

Just like the person in my memories, my paternal grandfather emerged from the dark quarters of the house while sporting a white coat with a shotgun in hand. His aggressive and swaggering strides didn't look like they belonged to someone in their old age, which was actually a relief to me.

“Oh, so you're finally back.”



My grandfather, who was rather tall among the old folks, placed his hand right on top of my head. I am, by the way, very tall for a girl.

“Huh, you’ve grown taller.”

“...Well, it *has* been quite a long while.”

On that topic, these past few years, I had shot up like a stalk of grain. I really didn’t want to keep growing much taller...

“Your skin’s looking nice too. Is it the carrots?”

“...Still hate them.”

My grandfather snorted.

“What, you haven’t grown up on the inside?”

“I think I did... probably.”

“Anyways, come in for now. I was just thinking of starting dinner.”

“Huh? I thought you were going hunting.”

I glanced at the shotgun he held in his hand.”

“Who goes hunting when it’s this late? I was just tweaking with it a bit to increase its firepower.”

My grandfather really liked guns.

“You rode the caravan truck back?”

“Yes.”

I didn’t mention the little incident I caused on the way here.

“Oh right, Grandpa. I think you’ve probably heard already, but I decided to become a Mediator just like you...”

“There’s some fine watercress for dinner. That stuff tastes great whether it’s with fried food or just bread.”

Even though I had grown taller, my grandfather’s ears callously glazed over my words like they still weren’t there.

We lined up a dried meat and vegetable stew, assorted western-style pickled vegetables and fresh produce, and a basket of sliced bread that was meant to go with the food.

My grandfather had prepared of all this himself.

Since he lived alone year round, he was extremely good at cooking.

Although he preferred whole roasts and smoked meat, occasionally he’d make more savory stews. The aroma of it kicked up faint memories of the distant past.

I carefully gathered a generous helping of pickled vegetables while each of us created a sandwich to our tastes. In the meantime, I spoke with my grandfather who was seated across from me.

“Is that so? The Institution of School is finally closing?”

“Yeah, there were so many related officials at the graduation ceremony... it really gave me a shock.”

“It’s always like that. When the school I went to shut down, a large number of officials also came by... Hey, you still haven’t fixed that bad habit of yours? Just open a shop already.”

There were five completely assembled sandwiches lined up in front of me.

“I get agitated if I try eating and making them at the same time... is that bad?”

“Whatever, suit yourself.”

Whenever I get into a rhythm with menial tasks like these, I always space out.

My friends joked that these runaway hands of mine were operating an entire cottage-industry, and my family often quipped that they were opening up a store.

“Are you going to eat all of those?”

“No, of course not. Even I can’t finish them all.”

I spoke without the slightest ounce of regret.

“You fool!”

My grandfather reached out and grabbed two of my sandwiches.

“Even if you’ve grown taller, you’re still that feeble thing like before.”

“I prefer the term civilized.”

“That’s a thing of the past. *The past*. Civilization or whatnot doesn’t exist anymore.”

“That reminds me, I rode on my first solar-powered truck earlier.”

“Those? They ain’t got speed or horsepower, and they’re impossible to repair if they break down.”

“Fortunately the truck never stopped. The trip was relatively uneventful.”

“The caravan troupes have some pretty nifty toys. You should go get a job with them, since you’d probably find it interesting.”

“Uhh, no... it’s impossible for me to do physical labor.”

At this moment there was a change in my grandfather’s expression as seemed to remember something.

“You really want to work at my place? You really don’t have force yourself to inherit my line of work.”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking. I even went through the trouble to get an academic degree. Besides, the office is still there, right? I want to stay in a place

that's formally recognized by the Institution."

"Your interests are quite strange. Why'd you insist on becoming a Mediator?"

"I thought this line of work would suit me."

"Oh? And the reason is?"

"...I figured it'd be much more laid-back than laboring in the fields."

I accidentally let my true feelings slip, caught off guard by the atmosphere of our reunion.

"So that's the reason why...?"

Even my grandfather seemed astonished.

I confronted the taut look in his eyes and replied innocently.

"Of course you remember how *fragile* my health is, right Grandpa?"

"No, earlier you were talking about finding some laid-back work."

...I said that?

"It's not what you think! These days, agriculture and animal husbandry are part of the basic curriculum... but that kind of work is *really* hard on the body. That's when I remembered that even *old* people could work as Mediators, so I figured that this line of work wouldn't be too much of a burden on my health."

Up against family, I wasn't nervous at all.

"...My granddaughter's picked up some really weird personality traits."

"Wha?"

"To me, it looks more like you lack willpower. It's not about how weak your body is."

"Huh."

"If you take it easy now, you'll lose your motivation to do anything when you grow up."

"Huh."

"...Well anyways, if you still think like that after a month on the job, I'd be

impressed.”

“Is your work really that difficult?”

Based on some cursory looks, I did do some research into the Mediator’s job description before I took the qualifying exams. But when you compared it with subsistence farming and other kinds of labor, I came to the conclusion that the Mediator’s job was a lot easier than the others... don’t tell me I was totally wrong?

My grandfather’s response was very vague.

“It depends on the person.”

I tilted my head at this. Could it be that some kind of harsh physical labor would suddenly appear?

“For now, just try and get in touch with “Them,” my useless granddaughter.”

“That’s a little rude.”

“But that’s precisely it. Tomorrow, come to the office and I’ll help you find a desk.”

And that’s how it was decided.

Author's Notes[edit]

1. [↑ “Donna, Donna”](#) - A famous relatively upbeat Yiddish theater song about a calf being shipped to slaughter. See: [additional information](#)
2. [↑ “The Farewell Waltz”](#) - Waltz in A-flat major, Op. 69, No.1 by Frédéric Chopin, written for piano. Also known as the “Valse de l’adieu.” See: [additional information](#)
3. [↑ Camphor Tree](#) - Japan’s largest species of hardwood evergreen tree. As random trivia, Totoro from the Hayao Miyazaki film lives in a camphor tree. See: [more information](#)

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